The Christian Life

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The Christian Life

A Study

By
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CINCINNATI: JENNINGS & PYE
NEW YORK: EATON & MAINS

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THE WESTERN METHODIST BOOK CONCERN

Preface

This study aims to be a help to sincerity and naturalness in religion by clearing up some of the confusions of popular religious thought and speech. We all feel that in religion, of all matters, we should be supremely real and sincere; and yet, owing to an ambiguous and misleading terminology and the illusions thence resulting, an uncomfortable air of artificiality and unreality often seems to pervade the subject. This is not commonly due to insincerity, but rather to the ambiguity and uncertainty of the conventional thought and language in this field. This condition of things, however, is an evil, and is one of the sources of religious weakness to-day. We grope in the dark of unwarranted expecta-

tions and misdirected effort. And the only way out seems to be to clear up our thought and speech, so that we may know what we wish and what we mean, thus enabling the religious life to grow unhindered and undistorted by illusion and misdirection.

BORDEN P. BOWNE.

The Christian Life
A Study

My purpose in writing, and the scope of the discussion, will best appear from some facts of experience:

Not long ago a most worthy minister of my acquaintance, one who had been preaching more than fifty years and who was a model of saintly living, came to another minister, also a friend of mine, to talk about the witness of the Spirit. And his trouble was that he could not feel sure that he had ever had this witness. The expectation awakened by the phrase had never been satisfied. And the good man's heart was disturbed, and he sought counsel of his brother.

My professional life has largely

been spent in contact with thoughtful young men and women; and I have frequently observed an uneasy feeling on their part that the traditional phrases of religious speech do not set forth with unstrained naturalness and transparent sincerity the facts of their religious life. Often they have formed a conception of what the religious life should be by reflection on the customary and inherited phrases; and thus they have been led to entertain unwarranted expectations. Then the failure to realize them has led to an uncomfortable sense of artificiality and unreality in all religious experience.

Some years ago one of our best and wisest men told me that he had felt the dangers in this direction so keenly that, when his children were growing toward the point where the conscious religious life

should begin, he had had himself appointed class-leader to his own family, in order to preserve them from the confusion and danger of popular religious speech until they should have acquired sufficient mental and spiritual maturity to grasp the truth for themselves.

In addition, I may say that I have been listening intelligently to preaching for over thirty years. Of course I have heard a great many good sermons, but in all that time I have heard very few sermons on conversion and the beginnings of the religious life, whether in our own Church or in others, which were not both confused and confusing. Theological expositions have been plentiful enough; vague verbal exhortations have abounded; but there has been a grievous lack of clear statement of what the

seeking soul is to expect, or of what is expected from it.

Such facts suggest, what every thoughtful and observant person must recognize, that there is need of revising popular religious phraseology, and also of clarifying popular conceptions concerning the religious life itself, and especially concerning its beginnings in conversion. This study is intended as a contribution to this desirable end.

The popular confusion on this subject in our individualistic Churches has several leading sources, and our first work must be to indicate them. The first is the confounding the language of theology with the languge of experience. The second is the mistaking of the abstract classifications of theological discussion for concrete classifications of living men.

The third is an exaggerated individualism. We consider them in their order.

The Language of Theology and the Language of Experience

On this point we must note that a great many things may be theologically true which are not psychologically true. We may express and explain the experience in terms of doctrine, and in so doing we may have the truth; nevertheless, the doctrine is not a fact of consciousness, but a theory about the fact.

Thus, when some brother of picturesque habit of speech says in the social meeting, "The devil told me not to come here to-night," we are not to think that he has had an infernal interview. The fact of experience is, that he was disinclined to come, and this disinclination he attributes to the

devil. But however correct this may be as a theory of the hidden source of the temptation, it would be highly infelicitous to suppose that anything of the sort occurred within the consciousness of the individual himself. The experience as he states it is not the experience as lying within the range of consciousness, but rather the experience as theologized or, more properly, diabolized by this infernal reference.

A less distasteful illustration of the difference between the language of theology and that of conscious experience may be found in our speech concerning the Divine providence in our lives. We believe and teach that our times are in God's hand; but this does not imply that we have any perception of the Divine presence, or even that we can clearly trace the way in which

God is working out his will concerning us.

The life of experience is the familiar life of question, uncertainty, forethought, calculation, and venture, in all of which, moreover, we commonly seem left, at our own risk, to find the way; and not infrequently we miss it, and go astray. We still retain the doctrine as an article of faith; but we see that we must work out our own salvation nevertheless. The doctrine expresses a theory of life rather than a conscious experience; and unless we bear this distinction in mind, it is more likely to be a source of doubt than of comfort.

This is self-evident to every thoughtful person; but what is not so plain to every one is, that there is a vast amount of language concerning the inner life which is of the same sort. It is not the

language of experience, but of theological theory. A great many things are said about the work of the Lord in the soul; the operations of the Spirit, his presence with us,—and all this may be true theologically, but it is not true psychologically. Moreover, a person who holds the theology in question may very naturally use it for expressing his experience; yet even that does not make it a fact of experience. It is an object of belief, not a fact of consciousness; an accepted doctrine, not a conscious datum. Nevertheless, this language of theory is put forward as the language of experience, and then confusion arises. By consequence a great many try to experience theology instead of experiencing religion.

Two classes of persons escape this confusion. The first class consists of those persons, unskilled

in reflection, whose language has only an accidental connection with their ideas. They hear and inherit phrases, and they have a measure of religious life. They also use the phrases upon occasion; but no one could ever discover from a reflection on the phrases, and the ordinary secular use of language, what the corresponding experience might be. One must gather this from an acquaintance with the subject matter, and with the peculiar forms of speech in this field. Here, again, we find illustration in the brother who says the devil tells him to do this or that. No exegesis of the utterance, according to the recognized usage of secular speech, would ever reveal that this means only that the person feels an inclination to some evil deed, and ascribes it to the devil as its source. Persons in this stage of

development are not harmed by speech which would be misleading to one who sought to understand it in the ordinary way. They do not get any ideas from language, but they express the ideas they have in the phrases which have become conventional upon the subject.

The second class of persons who suffer no harm from such language consists of those who have learned to take the language, not for what it seems to say, but for what they know it means. They understand the picturesque phrase, or discount the extravagant metaphor, or penetrate to the meaning behind some grotesque or distasteful image, and thus escape the illusion which might otherwise arise.

But there is a third class less fortunate. This consists of persons who have attained to some

measure of reflective consciousness, but who have not learned to distinguish the language of theology from the language of experience. By consequence they seek to tell what the religious fact should be by reflecting on the language they hear used to describe it. Only such or such an experience would come up to the demands of the language, and then they seek to have the experience. But somehow or other the appropriate experience does not come; and then comes either an attempt to believe the actual experience is the one desired or else a suspicion that the whole matter is fictitious. Not a few good Christions have lived on uneasy terms with their religious experience on this account. They have taken the language of theology for the language of consciousness, and thus have been led to form unwar-

ranted expectations. My friend, who was troubled about the witness of the Spirit, had the root of his difficulty right here. The phrase had led him to expect some sort of celestial manifestation, a testimony from without, and standing so clearly apart from the ordinary laws of mental movement as to be undeniably produced by the manifest God. In lack of any such experience, he doubted whether he had had the witness of the Spirit. This class comprises the great mass of thoughtful young persons in the Churches. And for this class the religious teacher needs to bear in mind the distinction between theology and consciousness, in order to escape misleading and dangerous confusion.

The language of theology must often be used, indeed, but it should be used in such a way as

not to mislead the inexperienced hearer or reader into an attempt to experience theology. And, in general, we must remember that all language about the inner life must be misleading to any one who interprets it only by the dictionary. Commonly the language is a metaphor, or it has a fixity and definiteness which do not belong to the fact. Or it may express an ideal toward which we strive, but which we never fully attain. There is much religious speech of this sort. It indicates a direction or sets forth an ideal, to which we can only approximate. The fact itself, however, can be learned only in life; and the language is only an imperfect instrument for expressing the life. The religious teacher can not be too careful and discriminating at this point.

Theological Abstractions and Living Men

The second great source of our confusion is the mistaking of the hard and fast lines and antitheses of theological ethics for concrete facts among living men. Ethics in general tends to fall into this error. We speak of the moral agent and of responsibility, and have fairly clear ideas as to our meaning, so long as we remain in the field of abstraction. But the matter becomes indefinitely more complex when we look at actual human beings. Then we find that we have to deal, not with hypothetical and abstract moral agents, but with beings in an order of development where the intellectual insight, the volitional energy and self-control, and the moral sensibility have to be developed, and where the develop-

ment is never complete. This complicates the matter indefinitely; and while our abstract ideas are still true as abstractions, we see that they have to be greatly modified in application.

The fact appears even more prominently in theology. We form such antithetical classes as saints and sinners, the saved and the unsaved; and we fancy that living human beings admit of being classified in this hard and fast way. Of course these abstractions are necessary in theoretical discussion, and the opposed classes are mutually exclusive and contradictory; nevertheless, concrete men, women, and children can not be divided off so easily. This is a world of growth from irresponsible ignorance and weakness toward responsible power and insight; it is a world of development from sub-moral and sub-

rational beginnings toward moral and rational endings. And in such a world we must view great masses of men as neither saved nor lost, but as developing towards these conditions. They are neither good nor bad, in a strictly moral sense, but are becoming good or bad. An academic ethics and an artificial theology find no place for them, yet they form the bulk of the human race. And we shall never reach any theory which will satisfy the developed moral judgment of men until this fact has been recognized. The human world is less a world in which moral classes exist than one in which moral classes are forming.

But this is generally overlooked, and we divide men into antithetical classes, as the saved and the unsaved. This has generally been done from an abstract standpoint;

and abstract law and abstract justice and abstract holiness and abstract sin have played their abstract part. But after we have adopted this division, it becomes an important matter to fix the standard of distinction. If one is not saved, it is a matter of serious concern to know the ground of the exclusion, particularly as the traditional classification by no means always runs parallel with our unsophisticated moral judgments. In response to this need, theologians have given a great variety of answers. Those who have lost themselves in theological and ritual mechanism, have found the mark of being saved in the due performance of some rite, or pronunciation of some formula; but this removes the matter from the moral and rational field altogether. The Churches which insist on personal piety, tend to fix atten-

tion on conversion, or a change of heart, or the new birth, as the distinctive mark of the saved; and, because of the failure to grasp the fact of development, this is commonly supposed to have a definite date in time. And in order that there be no mistake about a matter so important, these Churches have sought for unmistakable signs of grace which should leave no question. This has led to certain conceptions of these things to which experience must conform, on pain of being distrusted, if not rejected, as spurious; and this in turn has led to an indefinite amount of distortion of experience in order to bring it up to the assumed standard.

Exaggerated Individualism

In the imperfect conditions of undeveloped men, every good thing has its attendant evil, or at

least a tendency to develop into mistaken forms. A very general tendency, even in the Christian religion, has been to develop into mechanical externalism, in which the spirit is missed altogether. Ancient Pharisaism is a monumental example. The same thing is seen in the medieval Church; and modern Church history is not lacking in illustration. There is a tendency to substitute a mechanical performance of mechanical rites for the love and loyalty of the heart. Hence, religious reformers have commonly had to protest against this tendency, and to recall men to the worship of the spirit. The Lord looketh at the heart. They that worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth. The prophets of the Old Testament had for one of their chief burdens the worthlessness of rites and ceremonies,

and the necessity of the pure heart, if we would secure the Divine favor. God, who looketh at the heart, can never compound for spiritual obedience by accepting anything less. And this has been the tone of all succeeding reformers and reformations. Away with all salvation by machinery, by hearsay, by proxy, and let the soul come face to face with God in repentance and humility and faith! Only thus can it hope to obtain the remission of sins.

This view certainly represents the ideal of spiritual religion; and religious development must be looked upon as imperfect, even formally, until this stage has been reached. And if we were dealing with human beings ready-made and finished from the start, we might conceive that this is the only conception to be allowed. But the matter is complicated by

the fact and form of human development. This spiritual attitude may be demanded of those who have developed far enough to understand it; but what of those who have not? Are they saved or unsaved?

This question has been the source of some extraordinary notions in theology. The question itself arose from a failure to observe that development is the law of human life; and the notions held rested upon factitious ethical difficulties, based upon considering the problem in an abstract forensic way, instead of a concrete and truly ethical manner. Some theologians of rigor and vigor taught the damnation of infants, but humanity generally protested at this ultra rigor. But how to save them was a problem which received no single solution. The great body of Christians turned

baptism into a regenerating rite which insured the safety of its subjects. One can not make much out of this on ethical and rational grounds; but it is interesting as showing the well-nigh universal conviction of the Christian world that some way must be found of saving the children. Those who did not accept this device, found or invented others; and the same fact was true of these—they testified to a good disposition and to the recognition of a moral necessity; but it was exceedingly hard to adjust them to any ethical and rational scheme.

In general, here was a problem which the religious reformer did not always sufficiently consider. In assuming responsibility for the immature, the Church had made some provision for comprehending the race as a whole in the scheme of salvation; but in so doing, it

had also exposed itself to a variety of dangers. The Church easily came to be looked upon as having complete power of attorney in the case, so that the individual need not appear at all. This readily passed into a mechanical conception of religion, and a magical conception of salvation, in which all spirituality disappeared. The individual had nothing to do but to make arrangements with the Church, and the Church would do the rest.

Against such a conception the religious reformer rightly revolted. What does baptism amount to without the spirit? What does anything in religion amount to without the pure heart? And this can not be secured by proxy or machinery of any kind. Away then, once more, with all such matters! for salvation is a strictly individual thing. State Churches

were abominations, as their fruits clearly showed. The truly spiritual were to come out from among them, and be separate, and thus build up a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

All of this was well-meant, and all of this had its historical reasons, if not its justification. But none the less was it one-sided. Of course we must reject the mechanism of rite and ceremony as anything in which to trust, or which can dispense with the devotion of the heart; but we can do this and still recognize that this mechanism may be a valuable instrument in forming the thought and training the feeling of developing men. Of course we must reject the notion that the Church can forgive sins; but still we may believe that it can declare the forgiveness of sins which of itself it can not confer. We must

remember that the mass of human beings must live by hearsay, in religion as well as in most other matters; and thus the authoritative teaching of the Church acquires profound significance for the religious life of the individual. The religious reformer was right, but the Churchman was right too. The reformer emphasized individualism; and the Churchman emphasized solidarity. The reformer rightly held that the individual must for himself recognize and accept the Divine will, and that all below this was vain if this result was not reached; but the Churchman rightly held that the preparatory steps, while making nothing perfect, still had their religious significance in the development of the individual. Both views are needed for the full expression of the truth; and if the historic circumstances of the time

had permitted the reforms to go on within the Church, the result would have been better for all concerned. And this is true alike for the great Protestant Reformation and for minor reformations before and since. That both views are needed especially appears from the struggles of the extreme individualists in fixing the beginning of responsibility. One considerable body, which would hear of nothing but conscious choice and self-initiative in religion, officially fixed the tender age of eight years as the date when adult life begins.

But in their determination to have a holy Church, our Nonconformist ancestors decided to have only the best; and this made it necessary to draw a sharp line between the Church and the world. It was heresy to find this in baptism or any such thing. They

knew only too well that baptized persons could hold full membership in the synagogue of Satan. And as spirituality was their aim, they naturally fixed their attention on the religious life, and more especially on its assumed beginning in conversion. And, in order that there might be no mistake about the matter, a deal of attention was directed to the signs of grace, whereby a sheep might infallibly be known and separated from common goats. This led, in New England, under Edwards's influence, to much fictitious psychology and ethics, and to a general browbeating of human nature. Our Methodist ancestors tended to test conversion by its emotional attendants. Other things being equal, these will vary with the measure of the break between the new life and the old. An outbreaking sinner, who has been

living in violation of all the laws of God and man, could not begin the new life without a break with about all there was in his old life. In such a case the fountains of the great deep would be broken up within him, and there would be an intensity of feeling and a manifest new departure which would be lacking, or less obvious, in the case of a better man. And as Methodism, in its original work, dealt largely with persons of this class, conversions were largely of this type, and they came to be the standard to which conversions should conform. Such conversions were said to be clear or powerful; while others, less marked, though admitted, were still open to the suspicion of being less thorough. Every one familiar with Methodist revival services knows how much of this thing there has been among us.

Thus we have seen the origin and justification of the ideal of the individualistic Churches in regard to personal religion; and we have also seen how much confusion and uncertainty exist in popular thought respecting the matter. And the only way out of this confusion seems to be to get back to our fundamental religious conceptions, and from them seek to find our way to some clearer views of the religious life.

The Essential Point of View

Religious truth can be expressed only by figures borrowed from the relations of the life that now is. All religious speech, then, is based on metaphor, and must be taken, not for what it says, but for what it means. The task of religious thought is to

find the meaning in the metaphor, and also to find the metaphor which shall best express the meaning. There is a choice in metaphors.

The traditional theological doctrine concerning sin and salvation has been largely built on metaphors, taken partly from the rites of the ancient temple service and partly from governmental, legal, and criminal relations. God's relation to men was generally conceived, in the obsolescent theology of the past, as that of an irresponsible governor. Men were by nature criminals, and the theory of the mutual relations of God and men was based mainly on this conception. The notion of the governor and his rights was determined largely by the political absolutism of the time, and the standing of men was determined by the forms of criminal law and

criminal procedure. The two together produced a most incongruous compound. The theology was bad, and the ethics was worse. God, like the king, could do no wrong; and the clay was forbidden to protest at anything the potter might do. The infinite ill-desert of a sin against an infinite being was a favorite contention. Guilt was artificial, justice was artificial, penalty was artificial, salvation was artificial, perdition was artificial. There was very little in the doctrine concerning any of these things that spoke clearly and convincingly to the reason and conscience of men. This general view resulted in conceiving men as rebels, apostates, traitors, and as all deserving immediate perdition at the hands of God. They were by nature children of wrath, and of course unsaved. A great many texts, in-

terpreted according to the fashion of that time, readily lent themselves to such notions.

But the entire Church has grown away from this view, except as a very imperfect and inadequate representation of the truth. God may be represented as governor, but never with the limitations of a human governor, and still less with the irresponsibility of an Oriental ruler. The crude devices of criminal law, also, which are mainly makeshifts for doing as little injustice as possible, are never to be appealed to as models of divine procedure. We are fast displacing the entire conception of God as governor by the conception of God as father; and the conception of the divine government is giving place to the conception of the divine family. The deepest thought of God is not

that of ruler, but of father; and the deepest thought of men is not that of subjects, but of children. And the deepest thought concerning God's purpose in our life is not salvation from threatening danger, but the training and development of souls as the children of God. Salvation or redemption is but an incident or implication of this deeper purpose, and must be interpreted accordingly. The entire subject must be studied as a relation of living moral persons rather than of ethical and juristic abstractions.

This new conception of the fatherhood and the family contains all that was true in the old conception of governor and subject; but it is deeper and more comprehensive, and hence truer, than the old. And in so far as the older view conflicts with this, it must

be modified or set aside. It may be retained as a partial view, or as one aspect of the subject, but it must always be interpreted in accordance with the larger view. But, on the other hand, the new conception is not to be viewed as a sentimental one, or as involving a relaxation of the rigor of moral demands.

The training and development of souls as the children of God, then, is God's essential purpose in the creation of men; and we must understand our human life from this point of view. And we must also bear in mind that it is an order of development. That was not first which was spiritual, but that which was natural, and afterward that which was spiritual. The development has a natural root as well as a spiritual goal. The development also involves the unfolding of the con-

stitutional powers of man as well as his abstract spiritual capacities. For a long time the development remains on the plane of the natural without attaining to the consciously spiritual; but all the while it is the development of man in a divinely ordered scheme; and all the phases and factors of this scheme have their place and function in the divine plan for men.

Of course in such a scheme our traditional categories of the saved and the unsaved can not be applied in any hard and fast manner, but must be limited to a relative significance. They have a value in abstract theory, and they may express a limit toward which men are tending, but they can not be rigorously applied to the rank and file of the race. As said before, men are not so much saved as they are becoming

saved; and men are not so much lost as they are becoming lost. The process is going on; the classes are forming; but we are totally unable to form any fixed classification of these living men and women about us. The various traditional tests are grotesque in their inadequacy, when they are not purely mechanical and non-moral.

Human beings are carried on in the beginnings of their existence as unconsciously as nature itself. They are borne along like the rocks and the trees, the earth and the stars, without any sense of the will and the purpose which underlie their motion. But it is God's thought for men that they shall not always be borne along thus unconsciously, but shall become aware of God's presence and purpose in their lives, and shall reverently recognize the presence,

and filially accept and co-operate with the purpose. They are to pass from the unconsciousness of nature and the ignorance of childhood to the conscious recognition and acceptance of the Divine will; and then they are to go on with God in deepening sympathy and growing fellowship forever.

This is God's eternal thought for men, and it is not modified in any way in its essential nature by the fact of sin. Of course, a deal of what we call sin is error and mistake, arising from the ignorance of men who have to feel their way. And sin itself, as we find it among men, is largely the willfulness of freedom which has not learned self-control, rather than any deliberate choice of evil. Ignorance and untrained willfulness abound, and both alike must be removed, or they will increase and lead to disaster. Ignorance

must be enlightened if men are ever to find the way. The unchastened will must learn self-restraint if it is to run at large. But during the process we must not indulge in extravagant condemnation by bringing in the categories of abstract theological ethics. These have as little application to the case as they would have to the judgment of the family life.

This reference to the family gives us a hint of how developing beings are to be judged. The father's desire is, that the children shall come to recognize his love and filially to accept his commands. He desires that they shall develop into sympathy and fellowship with himself; and not until this stage is reached is the development complete. But in the meantime the children belong to the family, and have immeasur-

able value for the father's heart. They know little or nothing of the love that is lavished upon them; but it is there, nevertheless, and by it they are upborne and carried along. The parents have patience with the ignorance, the irresponsiveness, the willfulness, knowing that time and discipline and some experience of life are necessary to bring the children to any proper knowledge of themselves and of their duties. Meanwhile the wise parent is not unduly distressed at childish imperfection. He knows it is to be expected and must be borne with. He knows, too, that it is nothing very serious in itself—it is serious only in its tendencies; and he avails himself of all the means of discipline, of instruction, of correction, to prevent the evil tendencies from being realized. But he would regard it as in the highest degree

false and abominable if one should claim that the little rebellions of childhood forfeit membership in the family. Children can not rebel to this extent. Their ignorance and general lack of insight make it impossible. What might be possible with angels, we can not tell. What doom should follow rebellion committed in the full light of knowledge and with full insight into its evil nature, might be hard to say. But human life is not of this sort, and can not be treated in this way. Such discussion must be limited to treatises on the sin of the devil and his angels; it has no application to human conditions.

But we are sinners. Yes, but not outcasts. But we are rebels. No, we are prodigal sons. And God's grace is such that his essential will for us remains unchanged, that we should become

aware of his loving purpose for us, and should accept it in filial submission, and work together with him in building up his kingdom among men. And this, too, we understand from the side of the family again. The supreme desire of the prodigal's father was that the prodigal should come home to him, the father; and the supreme duty of the prodigal was to go home in the spirit of penitence, and devote himself to doing his father's will. And we, as prodigal sons of our Heavenly Father, have the same all-inclusive duty.

How the forgiveness of sin is made possible has been the subject of much theory, largely abstract and often unedifying. In fact, there is no completely satisfactory theory on the subject, supposing any theory is needed. We find various conceptions given in the Scriptures, which are mutu-

ally inconsistent when taken in strict literalness, and some of which would be immoral. This shows that they are not to be taken literally, but must be viewed as adumbrations of the truth; not the truth itself, but ways of putting it. And these views are to be understood psychologically rather than logically; as expressions of life rather than as statutory enactments. Taken in the former way, they are full of significance and truth; taken in the latter way, they become mechanical, irrational, and pernicious. But in any case, this question belongs to theology, and not to religious experience. However it may be brought about, or whatever hidden mystery there may lie in the Divine nature, the one thing we have to proclaim is the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins, the Divine help for all those who truly

seek it. The revelation of God in Christ is essentially a revelation of his grace and his gracious disposition toward us. He has sent his Son to proclaim this, and to put it beyond all doubt forever. The Father's heart yearns after the prodigal children; and all that we have to do is to come home in penitence and humility, trusting in his mercy and seeking to do his will. Whatever is more than this belongs to theology, and may possibly be important in that field. But the prodigal's duty is to go home; and for this he needs no theory of the atonement, no doctrine of substitution, or of imputed righteousness, or of ransom paid to the devil, or of governmental exigencies happily provided for; but solely the desire to find the Father's help and favor and forgiveness. And this conception of God, as full of grace and compas-

sion, as ready to forgive the penitent soul, and to give it power to become the child of God in the spirit, is the central idea of the gospel.

If these things are so, then the essential matter of Christian teaching is simplified. God's aim is to bring men to the recognition of his presence and purpose in their lives and to a filial acceptance of that purpose in all their conduct. If men are ignorant of that purpose, we must teach them. If they ignore it, or turn away from it, we must warn them. If they seek after God, we must declare his infinite nearness and his gracious condescension. If they turn from their evil ways, we must proclaim the forgiveness of sins. The whole matter will be clear if we bear in mind what God's purpose is for men. And the duty of the inquirer is equally

plain. Let him at once begin to do the will of God so far as he knows it, trusting in the Divine mercy for the forgiveness of sin and for all needed help. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. But, on the other hand, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me; and he ought not to hear me.

What, then, does God require of us? Various answers are given, all of which come to the same thing. An old prophet found the requirement in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Loving submission and active obedience to the will of God, is another formula. Seek to live so as to please God in all things, is still another. Believe

on the Lord Jesus Christ—that is, become his disciple and follower—is another. But they all mean the same thing. We are not required to have affecting views of our sins, or a sense of our deep unworthiness, or an insight into theology of any sort, but we are required to surrender ourselves to God to do his will.

But we are not yet converted, or born again, or saved. What has been said thus far smacks of legality and good works, and seems to make nothing of faith and the new birth and the witness of the Spirit; and these things are the very gist of spiritual religion.

In this objection we have an almost complete list of the confusion and misunderstandings which have darkened the discussion of this subject. We must consider them singly.

Underlying this objection there is a secret reference to the theology of abstraction. Abstract law and abstract justice are supposed to have claims upon us which must be met before we can become children of God; and surely our thought of conversion must largely concern itself with these. But here we must again remind ourselves that these questions belong to speculative theology and not to experience. If we were giving a philosophy of Christian doctrine, these questions might come up; but they are out of place when we are preaching the gospel. And we must further remind ourselves that the claims, whatever they may be, have been met; and the difficulties, whatever they may be, have been removed; so that we have to consider only the practical aspects of Christian doctrine. We turn over

the speculative and philosophical questions to the theologian, and continue to occupy ourselves with the practical life.

Working Definitions

There are many important theological terms and phrases which, from long use and thoughtlessness, have worn so smooth as to have lost most of their meaning; and the only way to restore them to significance seems to be to look directly at the facts from which the terms arise. Proceeding in this way, we discover that there is a vast deal of wrong thinking in the world, not merely erroneous thinking as in speculative matters, but wrong practical thinking. Men see things out of their right relations. They misjudge values and invert their relative importance. They have their minds full of these misconceptions, and practical con-

fusion and misdirection result. Hence the first condition of a new and better life is to repent; that is, men must change their minds or their ways of thinking about things. This is the Christian, or New Testament, idea of repentance; and this is the first condition for entering into the kingdom of God. It is not a question of getting to heaven, but of entering into that kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; and, of course, no one can enter this kingdom except by attaining to the spirit, the temper, the way of thinking, in which the kingdom consists.

Again, men are traveling the wrong road or in the wrong direction. They are moving away from life and from the highest things. They are on the downward grade. Hence they must be converted; that is, must turn

around, if they would enter into life. This is the New Testament idea of conversion; and this is not to be understood in a metaphysical sense, as implying some change in the substance of the soul; nor in a theological sense, as implying some difficult forensic adjustment in the court of heaven whereby the antithesis of justice and mercy is happily mediated. It is to be understood solely as implying the opposition between the contents and direction of the new life and those of the old.

In the same way the new birth is to be understood. If we consider the contents of the earthly life, its low aims and maxims—and hence its opposition to the life of the Spirit—we see that the change required for passing into the spiritual life is very strikingly called a new birth, or a birth from above. St. Paul called it a

resurrection from the dead. Both expressions mean the same thing, and both are equally metaphorical. They are to be understood from the side of life, and not from the side of theology. When thus understood, they are striking and expressive; but when they are taken for a hidden metaphysical process, they lose all intelligible meaning, and become an opaque theological wonder. Without doubt the Holy Spirit must assist us in our efforts. The weak will must be strengthened, the dull conscience must be enlightened, the wayward affections must be fixed; and in all this we need the co-working of God. But we always need this. And whatever mystery may attach thereto, its effect for us, and the only intelligible meaning we can ascribe to it, must consist in the turning of heart and will toward God, in the

set purpose to please and to serve him.

The same thing must be said of salvation or being saved. This also is to be ethically understood. What may be possible in the way of a forensic understanding, we leave to theologians to decide; but in any case, salvation must be ethically understood, or we are landed in artificial hocus-pocus, if not in downright immorality. To be sure, St. Paul used the terms of the Roman law very freely to set forth the great salvation, and in this has generally been followed by Protestant theologians. But it has long been apparent that these terms are not to be taken in a rigid literal sense. They must be seen as metaphors or ways of putting, and must be interpreted from the side of the moral life, and not by the dictionary alone. To love God and

to seek to serve and please him is the sum of human duty, and it is forever incredible that God should demand any more or be satisfied with any less. The Divine aim is to bring men into the loving recognition and acceptance of the Divine will. Forgiveness by the Heavenly Father is no more difficult than forgiveness by an earthly father, and in both cases what is desired is the establishment of the filial spirit in the heart and will of the wayward child. And this is salvation in the ethical sense, and the only salvation with which we have any practical concern. Salvation conceived as something possessed by one and not possessed by another of similar spirit and life, or conceived as depending on some device of celestial bookkeeping, or as depending on the performance of some rite or

the utterance of some formula, has no moral contents at all, but sinks to the level of magical incantations.

This matter of salvation and forgiveness has often been confused, even by the theologians, from failure to view it as a relation of moral persons. In their desire to save justice, they have sometimes become so confused as to represent justice as demanding a certain quantum of penalty, but quite indifferent as to who furnished or endured it. This is a most striking illustration of the confusion which may be wrought by a devotion to abstractions. When it is a question only of things, one person may take another's place, as when one pays another's debt; but when it is a question of moral persons and moral relations, such substitution is morally impossible in any lit-

eral sense. Imagine an ungrateful son who should demand that his father should receive him into all the privileges and affection of the family because some one else had performed the duties which the son had neglected or rejected. The father who could tolerate so odious a demand must himself be hopelessly confused mentally, or else indifferent to moral distinctions and proprieties. Plainly, the only salvation the moral nature can recognize is one which results in the re-establishment of the filial spirit and the filial life. The truth in the traditional doctrine on this subject is, that not even love can arbitrarily forgive or cancel consequences. This would make forgiveness itself immoral. The curse can be removed only by changing the heart, and setting healing and restorative agencies at work, by which the

evil consequences may be eliminated, as health overcomes disease. But this, which is the essential truth of the atonement, is often hidden behind abstractions which caricature or deny it.

But what of the supernatural in the religious life? We have spoken of men changing their minds and converting themselves, whereas they supremely need the aid of the Holy Spirit in this work. These reflections will naturally occur to those who fail to distinguish between the theological standpoint and that of conscious experience. But what we have said involves no denial of the supernatural. Without doubt men need help from above in effecting these changes, but no more than they need it in the spiritual life in general. But however much supernatural assistance may be needed, the thing to be reached

is the changed mind and heart, or the change of thought and feeling and direction of life. And the supernatural reveals itself in this power to become the children of God, and not at all in any scenic or hippodromic manifestations. In the former sense we affirm the supernatural with all conviction. And the religious teacher must not allow ignorant and excitable persons to mistake neurological disturbances, without any ethical contents, for manifestations of the Spirit. Untrained persons, of wonder-loving mental habit, easily fall into this mistake, and they must be guarded against it.

And from this concrete ethical standpoint, again, the meaning of sin and the sinful life is equally clear. The gist of the sinful life consists in the willingness to do wrong and the unwillingness to do

right. Some dealers in abstractions have thought to find something deeper than this, and they have proclaimed that sin is a nature, and that its nature is guilt. With such notions, nothing but a web of abstract fictions can be woven. And others, who have rejected this view, have often been so occupied with denying the existence of any abstract sin that they have overlooked the undeniable fact that there is a good deal of concrete wrong-doing among men, and that this wrong-doing must be done away with if men are to enter into life. It would tend to real progress if religious teachers would postpone the study of sin in the abstract until we have overcome this willingness to do wrong and this unwillingness to do right, from which both society and the individual so griev-

ously suffer. If this state of mind could be replaced by the love and practice of righteousness, we should have no practical concern about abstract sin.

Faith and works have been referred to, and salvation by faith has been mentioned as all-important. But here, too, confusion has reigned. This antithesis of faith and works owes its existence to a very low and crude moral conception. When works are mechanically conceived, as in ancient or modern Pharisaism, it is plain that they remain external to the spirit and count for nothing. No amount of them could have any significance for the spiritual development of soul. But when it is seen that good works, in any ethical sense of the phrase, involve as their supreme condition the inner loyalty and devo-

tion of heart and will, we see that there is no reason to be afraid of them.

Again, when the moral ideal is at all developed, there is no satisfaction in any actual attainment of our own; for the ideal is ever in advance and rebukes us. Hence no one of any spiritual attainment can ever reach peace through any good works of his own, but only by trusting in the infinite grace above him. We are perfectly clear that our salvation is of grace, not of debt; it is not of works, lest any man should boast; it is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. As the child has its standing in the family, not by the value of its services, but rather in and through the parental love which gives value to all the child does, so we have our standing in the divine family, not through the value of

our services, but rather and only through the infinite grace which gives all the value our poor best service may possess. This is that salvation by grace which is the glory of the gospel. And our trust in this grace, our yielding ourselves up to it in obedience and submission, is our faith. And that we can be truly saved—that is, lifted Godward—only in this way, is manifest. No mechanical round can lift us. No mechanical round has merit. We must trust in the grace above us, and we must struggle toward the ideal it holds out. Only thus can we rise. However we stumble or fall, we must not abandon our trust in, and devotion to, the grace revealed from on high. Understood in this way, salvation by faith is one of the deepest truths in religion. But when faith is conceived as a bare as-

sent to any theological dogma whatever, it becomes unfruitful and mechanical, and sometimes immoral and pernicious.

We have made this excursion into theology because the phrases examined constantly recur in the language of experience, and give it a peculiar form. Our conviction is, that these phrases are largely misunderstood from taking the implied metaphor for a literal fact, or from interpreting them by the dictionary instead of by life. But however this may be, it is clear that the theological doctrine concerning these matters must not be confused with the data of conscious experience. Whatever mysterious God-ward relations these doctrines may have is no practical concern of ours, and will doubtless be arranged for without our aid. For the consciousness of the disciple,

nothing is to be demanded or expected beyond the surrender, the devotion, the obedience, of the filial spirit. Theology is good, important, and even necessary in its place; but we do not bring men to God by means of theology. Nor should we confuse the mind of any seeker after God by trying to cast his thought and experience in any dogmatic mold; as if one could not find God without setting forth a scheme of evangelical theology, duly recognizing the several persons of the Trinity and their respective offices, specifying the provisions of the atonement, and going in order through the program of repentance, faith, justification, regeneration, adoption, and sanctification. Whatever value such a program may have is theological, not psychological; it represents abstractions of theory rather than facts of con-

sciousness. The two points of view should never be confounded. The life of trust and obedience is not to be secured by an examination in the catechism; and for bringing sinners into the kingdom of God, we need no more theology than is contained in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The Witness of the Spirit

In our previous study we have distinguished the language of experience from that of theology, and have warned against confounding them. But now we come to the witness of the Spirit; and this is said to be a fact of experience, and not merely a doctrine of theology. And it is further said by many that no one may count himself a true disciple, or member of the divine household, until he has received this

witness. And many good persons —some of the best indeed—have been greatly troubled thereby. The phrase seems to call for a miraculous manifestation, in which some external power stands manifestly apart from ourselves, and testifies that we are received into the Divine favor. And many persons, like the minister before mentioned, have watched and waited for some such manifestation, and as nothing has ever happened to them which contained any such psychological break, or which revealed any such apparition of another personality within the field of consciousness, they are left to doubt whether they ever had the witness of the Spirit. And as this witness is supposed to be a necessary mark of discipleship, they are left in doubt whether they are members of the divine family at all. There is

special need of clearing up our thought on this subject.

Two considerations must be premised: One is, that the doctrine, whatever it may be, must not be held in such a way as to make void the gospel. The other is, that the experience, whatever it may be, can not be confined to any single religious body.

The first point is by no means always regarded. That one should commit himself in faith and obedience to the keeping and service of the Lord Jesus, is not thought to be enough. That one should enter upon the life of discipleship, trusting in the promises of the gospel and seeking to do God's will, would not suffice. One might do all this, and still have no right to assume the place of a son in the Father's house. For this he must wait until he receives the witness; and the result often is,

that the object of faith and trust is not Christ and the Father whom he revealed, but rather and only certain feelings in the disciple. If these are present, he has confidence; if absent, he has not found the Lord, or the Lord has hidden his face. Thus the gospel itself is made void by thrusting some subjective test between the soul and its Savior, the only object of faith and trust.

And that this is no fictitious danger appears from the following utterance of a distinguished Methodist ecclesiastic the past summer: "John Wesley was sent out to preach a knowable religion—that a man might know that his sins are forgiven. There is only one way for him to learn that. Pardon is a change in the Divine mind concerning the sinner; whereas God regarded him as a guilty sinner, he now regards

him as a pardoned sinner. No one but God knows this change till he tells it. This is the old doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. When we get a man down before the altar, we do not tell him his sins are forgiven. We do not know. We simply hold him to it till God tells him; then the sinner knows it."

According to this master in Israel, then, it would seem that we may not venture on or rest in the promises of God without this special experience. We may indeed commit ourselves to his service in faith and obedience, trusting in his mercy; but we may not have any confidence that our Heavenly Father accepts us even then, because we can not tell what takes place in the Divine mind. This is a heresy from every standpoint, Scriptural and Methodistic alike. Wesley him-

self expressly rejected this interpretation of the doctrine.

Since I began writing, I have had a concrete illustration of the mischief of such indiscriminating teaching. A ministerial correspondent tells me of a woman of more than ordinary intelligence in his congregation, who for nineteen years wandered in a horror of great darkness because of such erroneous teaching. She had been told: "Do n't take anybody's word. When you are forgiven, you will know it. God will tell you." Almost the exact language, it will be observed, of the dignitary before mentioned.

And the second point mentioned must also be borne in mind. The witness of the Spirit as an experience of the Christian can not be limited to any religious body. Conceived as a doctrine, it might well be held by a

single body; but conceived as an experience, it must be the common property of all saints, so far as it is necessary to saintship. It would be grotesque to the last degree to suppose that God does something for Methodist saints which he does not do for Baptist, or Congregational, or Presbyterian saints; and it would be an impossible lack of charity to hold that only Methodists are saints. Most religious bodies have a few disciples of rigor and vigor who work out a sort of high-churchism for their own people, and question the discipleship of other bodies; but no sane Methodist would venture to construct his high-churchism on this line of the witness. And this fact shows either that the doctrine must be a theological one and not a datum of experience, or else that the experience itself, whatever it may

be, is not so definite as to exclude varying interpretations.

Returning now to the doctrine, we find theologians very uncertain about it. There is general agreement that it is most important, but there is little agreement as to what it means. That the phrase itself is not to be taken in strict literalness is manifest. No outside being appears within the disciple's consciousness and literally testifies to a celestial fact concerning his standing in the court of heaven. This is what our traditional language would lead us to expect, but there is no warrant for such expectation. The phrase itself as used by Paul in the classical passage—Romans viii, 16—seems to grow out of the ancient custom of adoption. Paul is trying to make his readers know the grace and wonder of the great salvation, and avails

himself of all the aids which familiar customs of society furnish. Among others he hits upon the custom of adoption familiar to the ancient world, and says: We are not aliens and strangers, but we are adopted into the divine family. God has sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of adoption whereby the filial spirit is wrought in us and we are enabled to look up to God as our Father. And having taken up this striking and suggestive figure, his thought runs on to complete it. For this act of adoption was not done in a corner and out of sight, but in public and before witnesses, that there might be no question about it forever after. And with this thought he adds: And the Spirit itself, that same Spirit of adoption, is a fellow-witness with our spirits, not to our spirits, but a fellow-witness of the fact that

we are children of God. If Paul had not been familiar with Roman law, there would have been no doctrine of adoption and no doctrine of the witness.

It is not now a question of what the work of the Spirit within or upon the soul may be, or what the function of the Spirit may be in the regeneration and sanctification of men. It may be the Spirit which works in us the filial mind and heart, which is the essential meaning of adoption. But these are theological questions, with which we have no present concern. We inquire only what the witness of the Spirit may mean as an event in the conscious experience of believers. And it is plain that this can be decided only by experience, and not by lexicons and dictionaries. No etymological analysis of a metaphor will reveal its meaning.

The uncertainty of theological thought on this subject is largely due to the perennial confusion of the standpoints of theology and consciousness; and the aberrations are due to the attempt to construct the doctrine as a matter of experience by analyzing the metaphor. The distinction between the direct and the indirect witness illustrates the uncertainty. The latter is an inference from the discerned presence of the fruits of the Spirit; but this is not thought to exhaust the doctrine. According to Wesley, the direct witness of the Spirit is "an inward impression upon the souls of believers whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirits that they are children of God." This seems to be clear, but it is not. If the "inward impression" is produced by God, yet so that God himself does not ap-

pear in any supernatural manifestation, then we have a theological doctrine concerning the source of the impression; but the witness is indirect. We have no supernal manifestation, but the heart is "strangely warmed." But Mr. Wesley does not seem to have been willing to affirm any miraculous appearance, but only the conviction wrought in us by the Spirit that we are the children of God; and this leaves us, so far as the Spirit is concerned, with a theological doctrine rather than a fact of consciousness. An experience wrought in us by the Spirit is one thing. An experience in which the Spirit is a factor of our consciousness may be quite another.

Wesley's uncertainty on this point comes out clearly in the series of letters to Mr. John Smith where this question is discussed.

The person who writes under the name of John Smith presses for a definition of the doctrine, and especially seeks to know whether the experience involves any supernatural or miraculous manifestation. Wesley is embarrassed by the insistence, and finally falls back on the statement that he holds the doctrine because it is revealed in the Scriptures—a fact which shows that he had not clearly distinguished between the doctrine as a truth of theology and as a fact of consciousness. There is no need to fall back on the Scriptures for proof of anything which we immediately experience. He also admits elsewhere that he has known a few good persons who do not seem to have had the witness. Nevertheless, it is a doctrine of Scripture, and must be maintained on that ground. But by this time we have a phrase

which we feel bound to use rather than a doctrine which we understand. At all events, it is not an experience which can be made a test of discipleship; for good persons exist who have not had it.

Returning now to life, the Christian fact is this: The sincere and continued attempt to be disciples of Christ results in the conviction that we are in the right way, that we are on the Lord's side and he is on our side: and this conviction grows from more to more as the life broadens and deepens. The new life takes firmer hold and strikes deeper root; and as the soul grows in grace and the knowledge of the truth, this life becomes more and more rooted in the conviction of its divine origin. Under the influence of Christian teaching, the believer will adjust his experience to the forms of Christian

thought and doctrine; and as we view the Spirit as the immediate agent in the purification, sanctification, and upbuilding of the soul, we naturally come to regard our graces, or strength, or joy, our peace, our rest in God, as wrought in us by the Spirit, as the marks of his presence, as the witness he perpetually bears in us to our being children of God. And this is all the witness of the Spirit means in general. What peculiar manifestations it may please God to make in certain crises of life or moments of spiritual exaltation, or what revelations he may make to particular persons, we may not decide; but such things are not to be demanded of any one as conditions or marks of sonship. For the great body of believers the fact of experience will be what we have described. If any claim that they

have had more abundant manifestations, we do not deny that it may be so. At the same time we reserve the right to apply to all such claims the supreme test: By their fruits ye shall know them. If, as often happens, these alleged manifestations are accompanied by no increase of moral and religious effectiveness, they will have no practical significance; and if, as is sometimes the case, the receivers of the alleged manifestations are not remarkable for mental force and moral character, there will be good ground for thinking that they have misheard the voices.

If it be said that the witness as thus described is no witness but only an inference, the answer is, that the meaning of a doctrine can not be fixed by analyzing a metaphor, and that this is the only witness which it pleases God

to give to most of his children. But when the doctrine is so understood as to subordinate even our faith in Christ and his gospel to some form of emotional experience, it becomes a pestilent heresy. We are not called to have experiences, or witnesses, or manifestations of any sort, but to be followers of Jesus. Whatever experiences of joy or peace or aspiration may come in this life of discipleship are to be welcomed, but they are never to be erected into tests of salvation.

In fact, this doctrine of the witness of the Spirit in our Church is to be historically rather than exegetically or psychologically understood. We gather its historical meaning from the errors against which the founders of Methodism aimed their protest. These were twofold. On the one hand, the State Church had largely

fallen a prey to sacerdotalism and religious mechanism. What with baptismal regeneration and sacramentarianism, the masses of its adherents had fallen into the notion that the Church would look after their salvation; and thus they failed to attain to any personal piety. In opposition to all this, the Methodist fathers summoned men to heart religion, setting forth the worthlessness of forms, rites, proxies, and insisting that every one should for himself experience the grace of God in the soul. To the hearsay and magic of baptismal regeneration, and the mechanism of rites and institutions, they opposed the self-evidencing life of the Spirit.

Again, at that time both the State and the Nonconforming Churches were largely under the influence of Calvinistic doctrine, and also of the notion that relig-

ion is pre-eminently a matter of orthodox belief. The Calvinistic teaching concerning the perseverance of the saints made it morally unsafe to teach a doctrine of assurance; and the heresy of orthodoxy tended to reduce religion to a barren intellectual assent to notional dogmas. In addition, God's goodness was so limited in any case, and the outlook for man was so grim, that there was little room or reason for joy in religion.

Against all these errors our fathers protested. For them, religion must be more than a machinery of rites and sacraments, and more than correctness of belief. It was no hearsay matter, but a conscious life, which found its great witness in itself. They also denied with all vehemence the Calvinistic conception of God and his government, and thus made love and joy possible once

more. And to express this conviction of life at first hand, and this joy in the Lord, they very naturally fell back on the witness of the Spirit. In the circumstances of the time it was practically a new doctrine, or a rediscovery of an old one. But the essential thing in it was the denial of the Calvinistic nightmare, the emphasis on personal religion, and the spiritual assurance which arises in the life of faith and obedience. This was historically the essential meaning and strength of the doctrine, and this it was that kept it sane and sweet. It was mainly a practical doctrine, and it was only under polemical stress that it ran off into doubtful exegesis and into theological and metaphysical interpretations. Thus the doctrine became prominent in our Church, and while thus practically held, it was true

and fundamental. The attempt to give it a theoretical standing was rather confusing than otherwise. The multitudinous experiences of joy, and even of emotional excitement, were gathered up into the doctrine; and all these were accepted as the witness of the Spirit, because that was the way in which we regarded the matter. Nowadays more discrimination is needed; but the essential contention of the fathers must never be lost sight of, that personal religion is the ideal of religious training and development, and that this personal life must justify itself as true and divine within the consciousness of the disciple himself. At the same time we must bear in mind that this consciousness will never be found by looking for it, or by any painful inspection of our spiritual states, but only by building our-

selves up in loving trust and active obedience on our most holy faith of the gospel of Christ.

Practical Misconceptions

The training and development of souls as the children of God is God's essential purpose in the creation of men. Our human life is to be dealt with from this point of view; and the religious teacher must fashion his instruction and direct his effort in accordance with this fundamental truth. His aim must be to help men to a consciousness of the Divine purpose, and to bring them into obedience to it. This recognition of the Divine will, this filial trust and obedience, are the heart of religion and the central meaning of salvation. But the attainment of this end is often hindered, and even thwarted, by misconceptions

against which we must be on our guard.

The emphasis which our Church has placed upon the emotional aspects of religion has not infrequently led to grave distortions of the truth. Emotion is good; and an emotionless religion would be a very questionable affair. Nevertheless it is easy to invert the true order, and this has often been done. Attention has been withdrawn from the solemn surrender of the will and life to God in order to engage in a barren hunt after emotions. This is inverted in every way, both religiously and psychologically. We must make clear to the inquirer that he is to consider himself as no longer his own, but as being in all things the disciple of the Lord Jesus and the servant of God. The exceeding breadth and depth and height of the commandment must be

made plain, so that he may see how all-inclusive is the service of God. And, on the other hand, emotions are never to be aimed at as things by themselves at all. In order to be wholesome and rational, emotions must spring from ideas; and religious emotions must spring from religious ideas. When sought by themselves and for themselves, they have neither rational nor moral significance, but are purely neurological or pathological. Religious emotions of this sort differ in nothing from the excitement of the howling or whirling dervishes. This is the source of the marked ethical weakness of popular revival services, and of the lack of moral fiber in so many alleged conversions.

It follows from this that religious emotions are not to be directly sought. They are to come as the unforced attendants of our

religious faith and devotion and obedience. When thus coming, they are wholesome, helpful, and natural. In every other case they are unwholesome, harmful, and unnatural. Indeed, emotions, as an affection of the sensibility, have so complex a root, and are so complicated with physical conditions, that they are generally worthless as a test of will and character. Even those relations in daily life which are founded on affection, as the relations of the family, admit of no test of the emotional sort. Devotion shows itself chiefly in service; and it is only at special times, in some crisis perhaps, that the emotional sensibility is deeply stirred. Love itself abides in the will rather than in the feeling, and its distinguishing mark consists in the set purpose to please and to serve. And this is true of our love for

God. It is to be found in the consecration of the life and the devotion of the will; not in ebullitions of the sensibilities, but in the fixed purpose to please and to serve. If, along with this, the heart should be "strangely warmed," there is no objection; but, after all, the root of the matter must be found in the life of devotion and service. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Such passages

these show that the essential test of discipleship is ethical and volitional, not emotional; and their frequent occurrence shows a purpose to ward off the very error in question.

A frequent consequence of this error concerning emotion is, that the attention of the inquirer is diverted from the central and essential thing, the surrender of the will and life to God, and fixed upon having an experience. This experience is crudely conceived as a striking emotional event which must be of an extraordinary character in order to meet the expectation. Thus the volitional and ethical element, which is essential, is subordinated to a passive and emotional element, which in any case is only a non-essential attendant of religious consecration, and which, in many cases, is purely pathological. That it

is such in a great many cases, appears from the fearful disproportion between the number of probationers and the number of those received into full membership. Who can believe that such disproportion would exist, if the inquirer had been rightly instructed, and had solemnly, intelligently, ethically devoted and consecrated himself to do the will of God? Emotional effervescence may subside in this way, but intelligent and moral self-consecration does not. There is so much confusion among us on this point that the majority of inquirers are aiming to have an experience rather than to surrender themselves to God in faith and obedience. And with this false aim they fail to "get through," or to "come out into the light." This mistaken aim at an experience has so affected our conception of conver-

sion that intercollegiate Christian workers have noticed it as a peculiarity of Methodist students that they seem to be seeking after some sign, instead of fixing their thought on the surrender of themselves in faith to the Lord Jesus to be his disciples. Often enough the sign is not given them, and then comes the familiar sense of uncertainty and artificiality in religion.

In opposition to this error, our attention should always be directed to securing filial submission to the will of God. The inquirer must be instructed, if need be, in Christian truth. His thought must be made familiar with the grace of God and the gracious provisions of the gospel. Peace and joy will naturally arise in the penitent soul as it contemplates this grace and yields itself to it in trust and obedience. But

their form and measure will vary very greatly with different persons according to education, temperament, and many other circumstances. But the disciple must not concern himself about them. Loving submission and active obedience to the will of God in accordance with the promises of Christ are the supreme and only mark of Christian discipleship. We are not called upon to have experiences, or emotional upheavals, or witnesses of the Spirit; but we are called upon to surrender ourselves in faith and humility to do the will of God. Cease to do evil, learn to do well, is the only infallible test of conversion.

The attitude of the will, then, is the central thing in the Christian life. But in applying this truth we must guard against an extravagance, often amounting to positive error, which may arise

at this point. We are often told that we must be willing to do whatsoever God may require, to give up all for Christ, etc.; and this admits of easy exaggeration. Formally, the statement is correct; but the concrete meaning is not always plain. Negatively, the meaning is simple. We must cease to do evil; any recognized iniquity, impiety, unrighteousness, wickedness, must be put away unhesitatingly, irrevocably, forever. That one should call himself the child of God while working the works of the devil, is not to be thought of for a moment.

But the positive contents of the idea are very crudely conceived. We often fall a prey to mere abstractions of theory without duly regarding the realities of life. Error here may take a double direction. We may fall

into an abstract conception of renunciation, and we may misconceive the relation of God's will to the great every-day life of work and social relations. The former error is illustrated by the fancy of some of the older New England theologians, that no one could be saved who was not willto be damned for the glory of God. Of course, a good closet argument could be made for this abomination. One might say that, so long as anything was preferred to the Divine glory, one had not fully submitted to the will of God; was keeping back a part of the price therefor, like Ananias; or, like Achan, had a wedge of gold and a Babylonish garment concealed in one's tent. Thorough work, then, could be made only by insisting upon willingness to be damned for the Divine glory. This was the only sure

test of selfishness. The purely fictitious and inhuman character of this demand is apparent. The only good thing that ever came out of it is the reported reply of an applicant to the examining committee which pressed the question, that he was willing the committee should be damned if need be.

We have escaped such excesses; but a great deal of unwisdom is still current on this point. Vague general remarks abound about taking up the cross, the surrender of this and that, the willingness to do a variety of disagreeable things; and these are often made the test of discipleship. Religious exhortation is full of matter of this sort; and inquirers are left to torment themselves with the fancy that anything which revolts their taste or sensibility, or some purely imaginary thing, as a willingness

to go as a missionary to Van Diemen's Land, or to address some stranger on the street concerning his soul, is a part of the cross which must be taken up, if one would enter into life. They are also led to think that an unwillingness to speak in public when they have nothing to say is to be ashamed of Jesus, or to do despite to the Spirit of grace. And, on the other hand, an unbecoming and unedifying volubility is often encouraged from the idea that thus the power of grace is triumphantly displayed. The following quotation from a religious paper of recent publication illustrates the former error:

Then the Lord God said to me: "David, are you willing to consecrate yourself?" "Yes, Lord. Everything, everything." And he brought one thing after another in this way: "Are you willing to leave your situation if I ask you?" I was quite willing.

"Would you go to Africa to be eaten by cannibals?" I was willing to do even that. Then the Lord said: "Would you leave your wife at home and go anywhere?" O, I was n't willing! It was very hard to leave my dear wife behind and go anywhere. Then a fight went on in my heart. I did n't want to yield that; but the Lord brought Christ very prominently before me, and he said that he must be first and my wife in the second place. Then he brought before me the responsibility of heathen souls, Mohammedans, Buddhists, and others. "David, are you willing to leave all to win souls?" Then it came to me: "What am I to do? The Lord will take care of my wife;" and I said, "O Lord, I am willing to leave my wife behind and go anywhere." Then the struggle ceased. "Would you like to become as the dust of Colombo for my sake?" Yes, I was willing. The Lord searched me through and through.

All this is purely fictitious. The Lord said none of these things; they were suggested

solely by the author's own misguided mind. The Lord often calls us to sacrifice and renunciation, but never in any such artificial fashion as this. The person simply had in his mind the abstract notion of complete surrender to God, and then proceeded to determine the concrete contents of the duty by calling up a miscellaneous collection of things to which he might be disinclined. Meanwhile reason and good sense were in complete abeyance, because of the fancy that all of these things were directly suggested by God as tests of the person's sincerity. The reference to leaving his wife is paralleled only by the testimony of a brother in class-meeting who reported that his wife had died, and that he had been so wonderfully supported by Divine grace that he had not missed her at all or felt any sorrow.

The leader had the grace and good sense to tell him never to repeat that story again, as it revealed inhuman insensibility rather than Divine support.

But with the uninstructed and sensitive conscience, misconceptions of this sort are likely to arise when one is testing his willingness to do the will of God. And it is not to be wondered at that many good Christians have been unwilling to have their children exposed to such crude and undiscriminating teaching. Of course the intellectually and morally pachydermatous are unharmed, but with the sensitive and uninstructed conscience the danger is great. And the danger is double. On the one hand there is danger of falling into fictitious sacrifices and mortifications; and, on the other, there is danger of a permanent revolt against religion

when at last the fiction is seen through. I have had ample experience of both results.

There is great need at this point for the wise Christian teacher, in order to save the untaught or inexperienced from these dangers. He must distinguish between the positive and negative aspects of this surrender to the Divine will. Its negative meaning, we have said, is clear; it involves the utter and final abandonment or avoidance of all unrighteousness and iniquity. On the positive side we must emphasize the central and primal duties about which there is no question. We must teach the inquirer to relate his life, internal and external, to the Divine will, and especially to comprehend the daily round of routine life and of social relations, the round of work and rest, of neighborly intercourse and civic

duties, within the Divine thought and purpose, and thus within the scope of religion. But we must resolutely defend the inquirer from all this unwholesome casuistry concerning crossbearing, and testifying, and fictitious self-crucifixions, and imaginary duties and trumped-up sacrifices. Ignorant conscientiousness can settle none of these questions. We must fall back on good sense, that general sense of reality and soundness without which the moral life becomes a series of snares and loses itself in silliness or fanaticism. We must point out that the essence of religion lies in the filial spirit, in the desire to serve and please God; and then we must point out that our all-inclusive religious duty is to offer up the daily life, pervaded and sanctified by the filial spirit, as our spiritual service and worship of God

But how shall we know when we have done enough? This is a question which roots partly in the unwholesome casuistry referred to, and partly in a desire to get off as cheaply as possible. In the latter case it shows that we have neither part nor lot in the matter. We are trying to conceive a spiritual relation mechanically, and we miss the spiritual element altogether. By consequence we asssume that salvation may be something external, and we desire to get it at the best bargain. Such notions arise from our non-ethical conceptions of the subject, and disappear forever when we see that salvation must consist in establishing or restoring the filial spirit in the heart.

The question, as rooted in casuistry, overlooks the essential truth of the gospel. The ques-

tion for the Christian to raise is not whether he has done enough, but whether he is seeking to live in the filial spirit. The latter question no one can answer for him, and he needs no one to answer it for him. As to doing enough, no one does enough. There is no satisfaction in doing. We are at best unprofitable servants. We can always wonder whether we might not have done more, strained a little harder, reached a greater intensity of effort. This way madness lies. On such a view one's salvation is a sort of Rupert's drop, and likely to fly into flinders at any moment.

To all such questions we reply by falling back on the gospel itself. We are not members of the Divine family because we are profitable servants, but because God has declared us to be his children. We stand not in the value of our

services, but in the Divine love. And that love bears with our imperfect, halting service, and takes the will for the deed. This is the gist and glory of the gospel. It can not be understood in forensic and mechanical terms, but it is perfectly intelligible through the life of the family or the gratitude of a penitent heart. No child has its place in the family because of the value and merit of its services, but because it is a child. It is saved by grace, not by works. But being a child, it can show forth the filial spirit in word and deed, and parental love does all the rest. Membership in the divine family is similarly conditioned.

We must, then, declare the forgiveness of sins to all those who do truly and earnestly repent of their sins and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments

of God, and walking henceforth in his holy ways. And this we do in the name and on the authority of the Lord Jesus, who has revealed the Father. And we must allow nothing to interfere with the simplicity of this revelation. Mechanical conditions of mechanical works, and subjective conditions framed from emotional states, are alike and equally departures from the truth of the gospel.

Religious Beginnings

The religious life in its idea is altogether independent of the existence of sin. We are not, then, to think of it as a device for overcoming sin or for saving sinners. This work, indeed, has to be done; but it is only incidental to the deeper, more inclusive aim of religion. Religion has to do with the relation of man to God, and

would exist if there were no sin in the world or in the heart. Indeed, it is only in the sinless life that the ideal of religion can be perfectly realized; for only there can we find the filial spirit perfectly realized and perfectly expressed.

In what we have now to say, some readers of theological tendencies will miss a good deal of traditional matter concerning the relation of the sinner to God's law, etc.; but we have once more to remind them that this, in its best estate, is matter of theology and not of experience. Whatever mysteries there may be in that direction, we have no practical concern with them. We have only to accept our place as children in our Father's house; and we must not confuse this simple truth of the gospel with matter drawn from theology.

If human development were normal, there would be no need of conversion—that is, of a turning around, or a turning toward God; for we should never have turned away from him. We should simply pass from the unconsciousness and passivity of dawning life to the distinct consciousness and volitional attitude of mature life. And this transition would be made slowly, and without break or jar, something as the dawn comes up. As in the family life no one can tell, in the child's unfolding, when love and obedience begin, so in the normal development of the religious life, no one could tell when it begins. The inner life has none of the sharp divisions of our speech; and consciousness fades away from clear apprehension and distinct volition into incipiencies, and uncertain dawnings, and shadowy

beginnings, where directions may possibly be discerned, but no fixed lines can be drawn. In such normal unfolding there might be great individual differences of experience, owing to differences of temperament and mental habit. With the more reflective the recognition and acceptance of the Divine will might be a matter of more definite date, but they would be no more real on that account than they would be in a life of less sharply-marked transitions. And with such reflective person such a date might well be a time forever to be remembered unto the Lord; but it would not mark a conversion, but only a conscious affirmation and ratification of what had already been unconsciously done.

In actual life the nearest approximation to such normal religious development is found in the Christian family. Here, too,

the aim should be, not conversion, but to bring the children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and the necessity of conversion, or a turning from sin to God and righteousness, hints strongly at parental failure either to grasp the truth of the gospel or to realize it in the family life. The ideal form of the Christian life is that which never experienced conversion, and which can not date its beginning. And if one says, But there must be a time of distinct choice between God and the world, etc., the answer would be that at best this only fixes the beginning of self-consciousness in religion and not the beginning of religion itself. And indeed self-consciousness can rarely be thus accurately dated; but religion in the properly-trained Christian child has complex and untraceable beginnings in the

spirit and atmosphere of the home, in childhood's prayers, in participation in religious rites and customs, in imitation of those about him, in wise parental instruction and discipline, and in the hidden influence of the Holy Spirit. These things can not be dated. The date of self-consciousness in choice and consecration might conceivably be fixed in the case of the Christian child; but even this is rarely possible and it is unimportant in any case. When does filial affection begin in the growing child, or patriotism in the developing youth? The important thing is not to know when the day begins, but to have the day actually here.

Divine grace and help are always needed and by all alike; but conversion as an event in conscious experience is needed only for those who, from evil training or from

willful transgression, have turned away from God. All such persons must convert themselves; that is, must turn around and turn towards God and righteousness. But in all cases the thing aimed at is the same—the establishment of the filial spirit as the ruling principle of life and action. Where the filial spirit is consciously present we have the children of the kingdom. Where it is consciously absent we have the children of disobedience. Where there is no consciousness as yet of the higher goods and relations of life we have simply the sub-religious state in which so many human beings exist, and out of which they are to develop through the multiform discipline and experience of life. Meanwhile they are the objects of the Divine grace and are comprised in an order divinely appointed for their

development and unfolding into deeper and higher life. Hard and fast divisions and classifications are impossible in such an order; and forensic distinctions are as grotesquely impossible as they would be in the life of the family. Meanwhile it is the task of the Christian teacher and of the mature disciple to co-operate with the Divine love by setting forth and revealing the higher life by precept and example both personally and through the organized institutions of the Christian family and the Church.

And in doing this work it is important to remember that the religious life, except in its central factor of the filial and obedient spirit, is no simple and single thing which is present always and all at once and to all alike. On the contrary, the contents of religious experience vary with the

disciple's age, temperament, mental type and nature of his previous life. The Christian life is one in principle, but in form and contents it is as varied as humanity itself.

This truth has not been duly regarded by the Churches which emphasize conversion and personal experience. The tendency has been to construct a pattern to which all should conform; and this pattern has largely been built out of subjective emotional states and various marks of grace which only, it was thought, clearly distinguish the work of the Spirit from spurious imitations. This was generally harmless when we were dealing with hardened sinners, but it became mischievous when applied to the religion of childhood, and to the religious life that should develop under the influence of a Christian home and

in a Christian community. Owing to the confusion of theology with experience, or to the undue estimate of emotional factors, the popular ideal of the religious life in our individualistic Churches has little application to the larger part of the community.

Types of Religious Experience

In order to escape the confusion and inadequacy of traditional thought on this general subject, we must observe that the religious life is manifold in content and manifestation according to the age, the mental type, and one's experience of life.

Apart from the variations dependent upon age, temperament, and the vicissitudes of the individual lot, there are distinct types of religious thought and feeling, all of which are equally founded in human nature, and no one of

which may set itself up as the norm or ideal by which the others may be tested.

The first type is the ethical. Religion consists in righteousness; but it is more than abstract ethics, because the moral law, from being an impersonal principle, is elevated into the expression of a supreme and holy will. The regard for impersonal abstractions is replaced by enthusiasm for the kingdom of God. Christianity summons us to be members of this kingdom and co-workers with God in its establishment. Under the lead of the Captain of our salvation, and relying on his word and promises, we become conscious subjects of the kingdom. In quiet times, and with persons of wholesome training and habits, or with persons of unemotional type, and especially with children, this is the prevailing type of Christian experience.

It is not markedly emotional. It is not given to fervors, whether of joy or remorse. It has no deep distress over the depravity of our nature, and no flaming raptures over our deliverance. But it is founded in conscience; and a very large part of the work of the Church is done by the Christians of this type. This is the Christianity of the Synoptic Gospels, and of the epistles of James and Peter.

But this is not the only type. It is fundamental indeed; and any type which does not include it is false. But it does not include the whole of Christian experience. There are souls which can be satisfied with their obedience to God's law. They hear the commandment, and they obey; and the joy of a good conscience is theirs. But there are other souls which can never find peace in this way.

For them the commandment is exceedingly broad. It is not a matter of detached duties, but takes account of the heart. They hold their lives up against the keen, still splendor of the Divine perfection, and they are overwhelmed by the revelation. For such persons there is no peace in doing. The more they do the worse they feel. For the ideal grows with obedience and thus condemns them more and more. For this state of mind there is only one prescription. They must be taken out of themselves and away from the contemplation of their own efforts, and must be taught that we are saved by grace, not works. Then their distress is removed by the vision of that condescending grace from above which saves us through itself. This is the Pauline type of Christian experience. It is not more

truly Christian than the purely ethical type, but it is different. It is more intense, and touches the moral life at deeper depths. With persons of a mechanical type it may pass over into Antinomianism, and thus, in revolting from bondage to rules, become the extreme of immorality. But when rightly understood, when interpreted vitally and ethically, it includes the obedience of the ethical type, but transcends it by a higher moral ideal and insight.

Another type of Christian experience arises from the desire for direct personal communion with God. If God indeed dwell within us, there must be some other way of reaching him than by hearsay, whether of the Bible or of theology, or of the Church. And if we are his children, there must be some way of direct communion with our Father. Besides,

the life of work is only part of experience. There is also the life of contemplation, of secret aspiration, of adoration and worship. And this certainly can not all be on one side, as if we prayed into the empty air with no answer but the echo of our own voices. Here the mystical element of religion reveals itself. And this, too, is a real aspect of the religious life; not equally recognized by all, and scarcely realized at all by many, but important nevertheless. It is represented by the writings of St. John in the New Testament, by the various bodies of mystics in Church history, and by multitudes of individual saints. As said, it belongs to the contemplative rather than the active side of religion; but it is important, even for practice, by furnishing the living water, without which life loses its deepest spring.

The perfect Christian life would involve all of these forms of experience; but in our one-sided life, one form or another predominates, and then we have to be on our guard against the shortcomings of that form. For each form has tendencies to error which will surely develop unless proper precaution be taken. The ethical form by itself may easily issue in Pharisaism and spiritual pride. When the spiritual nature is not deep, duty is exhausted in commandments; and if anything more be suspected, it is simply another commandment. The young man who had kept the law from his youth up, or the Pharisee who recited his good deeds in his prayers, furnishes a fair specimen of the tendency and the danger. And this can be averted only by enlarging the moral insight, and replacing a code of isolated good

works by the law of perfect purity and perfect love. This only can cause the self-satisfied Pharisee to exchange his vainglorious prayers for the cry of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The ethical type, also, from its pre-eminent attention to conduct and action, tends to become dry and thin, and to lose itself in ineffectual bustle, while the spiritual life withers. This, too, can be avoided, only by the deepening and enriching influences of prayer and meditation, and of spiritual communion with the Father of our spirits. Thus the ethical type of religious life always needs to be combined with the other types in order to save it from its own shortcomings.

But they equally need to be combined with the ethical type to save them from their own shortcomings. When one has sought

in vain for peace through mechanical good works or strenuous conscientiousness, there is no more glorious truth than this, that we are saved by grace through faith; but this becomes a pernicious and immoral doctrine unless it be ethically apprehended and applied. How often this danger has been realized is familiar to every student of Church history. The contemplative life also easily loses itself in quietistic indifference to the work of the world, or in a barren cultivation of emotions, in which all moral quality and moral strenuousness disappear altogether. Now, while the ethical view needs to be deepened by the others, they, in turn, need the ethical view to give them fiber and substance, and to furnish the active nature of man a worthy task. And this can be found only in recalling the mind from painful in-

spection of its own states, and from quietistic dreaming and contemplation, and setting it upon the positive task of realizing the kingdom of God in the world. The ethical view is fundamental and central; and however far we may go in religious fervor and aspiration, we must never lose sight of the ethical aim. All truly religious growth and insight must be based on this. And one of the promising features of the present religious outlook is the tendency to pay less attention to subjective states, and more to the objective aim of building up the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of righteousness and good will.

These various types of religious experience appear among the apostles themselves. Jesus is the only man who has perfectly united them, and perfectly realized the perfect life. The types reappear

in Church history; and it would not be difficult to group existing religious bodies by this standard. And when to these fundamental differences we add those arising from difference of temperament, circumstances, experience of life, we see how impossible it is to fashion individual experience according to a single pattern. The attempt to do so implies a species of religious provincialism which is in sad need of enlightenment.

These facts must be borne in mind by the Christian teacher; and he must carefully refrain from applying any other test of religion than the filial spirit, or the desire and purpose to serve and please God by keeping his commandments. The grace of God does all the rest. And on this most holy faith of the gospel we are to build ourselves up into all obedience and spiritual

growth through the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit. In this way the Christian life will unfold naturally and in accordance with the experience and peculiar type of the individual. Nothing being demanded but the filial spirit, that spirit can manifest itself in various ways and be the same spirit in them all. Thus we secure in the Christian life something of the artistic effect of free spontaneity and of varied individuality instead of a mechanical monotony. By fixing our thought on the filial spirit, we shall run little risk of confusing ourselves with theological and metaphysical subtleties on the one hand, or with artificial and impossible experiences on the other. Christian truth is manifold and meets the needs of all; but every phase of this truth does not appeal equally to all, nor even to the same at all times.

Religion of Childhood

The teaching and practice of the individualistic Churches concerning the religion of childhood have generally oscillated between two extremes of error; either children have been viewed as incapable of religion, or forms of experience have been demanded from them which are possible only to mature life, and often only to abandoned sinners. In this matter our Methodist practice has been far worse than our theory. Theoretically we have held the right view of Christian childhood and its relation to the Church. We regard all children who have been baptized as placed in visible covenant relation to God, and under the special care and supervision of the Church. The pastor is required to organize the baptized children, not excluding the

unbaptized, into classes for religious instruction; and whenever the baptized children shall understand the obligations of religion and give evidence of piety, they may be admitted into full membership in the Church. But practically these wise provisions, though in the direct line of our theology, have been generally ignored. We have "leaned too much to Calvinism" in practice; and a particular conception of conversion has further confused matters by demanding from the children experiences which belong only to mature life. Here is one root of our relative ill-success in this field, and of our frequent failure to hold our more thoughtful families beyond one or two generations. And this ill-success and failure will continue and increase until we put our own doctrines on this subject into rational prac-

tice. We must no longer allow a mechanical devotion to inherited and often mechanical methods to drive us into the gross pedagogical and psychological error of expecting from childhood the religious manifestations of maturity.

All the Churches which emphasize personal religion have been more or less guilty of this fault; and they need to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. There is a large body of feelings, much affected by the artificially spiritual, which are not religious at all, but are simply expressions of advancing age. Such are the sense of the brevity of life and of the unsatisfying nature of all earthly things. Feelings of this sort are unnatural to the young; and language of this sort from them can only be an echo, or an expression of artificial sentiment. There are many other feelings of

a religious nature which are also impossible to the young. Such are a deep sense of sinfulness, of human weakness, of the depravity of human nature, of the imperfection of our righteousness, and of the constant need of Divine grace and forbearance and forgiveness. Such insight is impossible to childhood, for it is born only of the deeper experiences of mature life and of the sterner conflicts of faith. Yet we have not scrupled to gather up these feelings and convictions as pre-eminently marks of grace, and to look for them in the life of childhood. And sometimes the child repeats the phrases, to our great delight and edification. Or we see that the meaning is really beyond the child, and then we conclude that children are incapable of religion.

Both of these errors are to be

avoided. The religion of maturity is impossible to childhood, but the religion of childhood is religion nevertheless. It is largely of the simple ethical type, not without its naïve misconceptions and innocent misunderstandings; but it may be very loyal for all that. We often misjudge the religion of childhood by misinterpreting the transparency of childhood. When we find petulance, inconstancy, inconsistency, indifference in children, we conclude that there is no religious principle. But the poorer show that childhood makes in these respects in comparison with the more mature is commonly due to its transparent simplicity. It has not learned self-control and dissimulation. It finds the Sabbath irksome, and says so. It finds the religious exercise distasteful, and the fact is revealed. The man

has the same experience, but keeps it to himself. His thoughts may be all abroad during the prayer or the sermon, but nobody knows it. Due consideration of this fact would lead to a juster estimate of the religion of childhood.

Christian truth, we have already said, is manifold, and meets the needs of all; but the needs vary with age, experience, temperament, mental type, etc., and the religious life will vary to correspond. This must be borne in mind in dealing with the religion of the young. It is one of God's great mercies that those who have the earthly life before them are generally pleased with it. Hence, to the young, it is a glad thing to live, and we ought not to wish it otherwise. Without this naïve optimism of youth, life would hardly be possible; and nothing could well be more false to Chris-

tian truth and the Christian spirit than interference therewith in the supposed interests of piety. We must not, then, call upon the young to have mournful and despondent feelings about the life that now is, and a desire to depart and be with Christ, in the fancy that thereby they become more truly religious. We must rather remind them that this earth also is one of the many mansions in the Father's house, and seek to help them to relate this life to God's will. The child's optimism is really nearer the truth than the old man's pessimism; for it is God's world after all, and it is right that we should rejoice in it and be glad; and instead of rebuking the children for their simple joy in life, we should rather rebuke the pessimism of maturity as rooting in a lack of faith.

Let, then, the children take

their vows with a glad heart; and when life wears on, and experience deepens, and the overturnings come, they will learn of themselves that this earth is not our rest, and will appreciate the life and immortality brought to light in the gospel. They will also learn the blessedness of the corresponding fact that we are saved by grace. Any true appreciation of these things comes only through life. The formulas may be learned from a catechism, but their meaning comes from experience; and, coming in this way, it is unforced and natural. It is not a sign of grace, which is anxiously to be sought for in all Christians, but an insight which is developed only in the maturer Christian life. And the lacking insight, or the lesser measure of insight, points only to a less advanced religious development, and not to being an alien

or stranger in the household of faith.

And now we must have a final word with the traditionalist, who confuses theology with experience. He will certainly miss, in the previous exposition, a deal to which he has been accustomed. He is not content to find in conversion simply a turning to God in trust and obedience according to the commands and promises of Christ, but discerns in it mysterious forensic relations to the Divine justice, and also deep metaphysical changes in the soul itself. The former element is necessary in order to meet the supposed demands of justice; and the latter element is peculiarly necessary for distinguishing the work of grace from mere natural goodness. Such goodness, not being of faith, is of course of sin; and there is needed

some sure standard whereby these counterfeits of grace may be detected. Such a standard is at least formally furnished by the view in question. Judged by character and conduct, it is not easy to mark off men into two sharply distinct classes; but if we may suppose some hidden forensic or metaphysical change or event, then the distinction is easy. The converted are those in whom this change has taken place. All others are unconverted, and their righteousness, however fair in seeming, is filthy rags. But as thus conceived, the operation is as mechanical as baptismal regeneration itself. It is taken entirely out of the intelligible ethical realm, and is with difficulty saved from vanishing into abstract hocus-pocus.

We escape this confusion by again reminding ourselves that salvation on the human side must

essentially consist in the production of the filial spirit, and that forensic difficulties, if not fictions of abstract theology, are something with which we have no practical concern. Whatever hidden difficulties in the Divine nature or government there may be respecting the forgiveness of sins, our Methodist faith is that they have all been met, so that our sole duty is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, to call the prodigals home to the Father's house, and to bring up the children to be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. All beyond this is theology, and is of no practical moment. The great danger to which men are exposed consists in unlikeness to God in sympathy and purpose. If this unlikeness can be removed, everything else will take care of itself. Remembering the form of human devel-

opment and the universality of the provisions of the gospel, we must say that every one is in the Divine family who does not insist on taking himself out. And our effort must be directed to bringing men to recognize their duties, relations, and privileges as members of the family.

But the person who thinks mechanically will continue to ask, Who, then, are the saved? This question is best answered by asking another, Who are the unsaved? To this we can give an answer. The unsaved are all those who are living in unrighteousness and unfilial rejection of the law and grace of God. These are the prodigal sons who must return to their Father or reap the fruit of their doings. All others are saved in this sense, that they are comprehended in an order of Divine grace which is working toward

their development into the consciousness and acceptance of their place in God's family. But the development is nowhere complete. It stretches all the way from the unconsciousness of childhood to the still imperfect apprehension and devotion of the mature saint. But all alike stand in the Divine grace; and the Divine love is bearing them on. And our task consists in co-working with this love, that the will of God may be seen and done by us, and on the earth, as it is seen and done in heaven. Beyond this, judgment is not ours. Our sole hope is in the mercy and goodness of God.

Conclusion

It is no quick and easy process, this building of men into the realization of their Divine sonship. The theory may be

simple but the practice is difficult. We can all see what is to be done; but how to do it, demands all our wisdom and all our patience. The work proceeds slowly within ourselves; and this should moderate our impatience at its slowness in others. God has patience with us, and we in our measure must have patience also. I am far from thinking, then, that any short cuts have been revealed as the result of our study. My only thought has been to reach a clearer conception of the Divine aim and method in human life which will save us from misdirected effort and misleading expectations in our attempts to realize the kingdom of God. Several points may be mentioned as significant for the better prosecution of our work.

1. Personal religion is the ideal of religious development, and the

development may never be viewed as complete until this ideal has been reached. No rites or formulas or institutions or officials can take its place; and they must never be allowed to thrust themselves between the soul and God as necessary media of the Divine favor or manifestation. The only value we can attribute to them is of an instrumental, pedagogical, and temporary character. On this point we can not be too peremptory. It marks the difference between a mechanical and a spiritual religion.

2. In realizing this ideal we must carefully distinguish the language of theology from that of experience. Without this distinction the untrained disciple is inevitably confused, and seeks, as we have said, to experience theology rather than religion.

3. We must remember the im-

perfection of language itself as an instrument for expressing the inner life. We must guard against its over-definiteness, and also against mistaking its metaphors for facts. This can be done only by using language critically, by passing behind the word to the fact and by inquiring whether the language describes an experience or sets forth an ideal. Much language is of the latter sort, as often in prayer; it represents nothing we have ever experienced, but rather an ideal aspiration. The religious teacher must exercise great care at this point to save inexperienced hearers from dangerous verbal snares.

4. We must distinguish between the theological theory which may be necessary for a philosophy of Christianity and the simple truth of God's grace and gracious condescension which

is the practical gist of the gospel. Along with this we must see that the production of the filial spirit in men is the essential practical meaning of salvation. If we can secure this, we may be sure that all else will be provided for.

5. We must put supreme emphasis on the ethical and volitional element in conversion, and make it forever impossible for our hearers to mistake anything for religion which does not include as its essential factor absolute loyalty to the will of God. This does not imply that emotion is to be rejected, or that it is not good; but only that it is always to spring from Christian ideas, and is to be subordinated to moral ends. Only thus can it be kept sane and pure; and only thus can the popular revival service be saved from degenerating into pathological excesses, scandalous

alike to good taste, to good sense, and to good morals. But when emotion springs from Christian truth, and is subordinated to moral ends, we can not have too much of it.

6. We must remember that religious experience is no simple and single thing alike in all, but is as complex and multiform as life itself. We must, then, beware of forming a single standard or pattern of thought and feeling to which all should conform, beyond the one central factor of submission to the will of God. A recognition and artistic development of individuality are needed in this field.

7. We must deal more rationally with the religion of childhood, neither allowing the children to run wild, nor expecting of them the religious manifestations of maturity. For this work wise

pastoral oversight will be needed, and also, and more especially, a wise and sympathetic home religion.

8. More attention should be given to Christian training and edification. Whatever may be the case with other Churches, the Methodist Church, as a body, needs to give more attention to the edification of the saints and to the building of character. Conversion, in any sense, is only introductory—the crude beginning, and not the end.

9. We must expand our conception of religion until it becomes the principle of all living, and includes all life within its scope. We must take all the great normal interests of humanity—the social, the industrial, the educational, the political—into the field of religion. These furnish the field in and through

which the Christian spirit is to realize itself. The Church, as a whole, has been sadly lacking in this matter. The tendency has been to count only the formally religious activity—the activity of prayer and meditation and worship—as being truly religious; and the religious value of the great secular life, with all its manifold interests, has been largely ignored. One great condition of religious progress in the future must lie in removing this false and unchristian antithesis of the secular and the religious.

10. The spirit, the life, is the essential thing; methods are only instrumental, and are valuable solely for what they help us to. All religious teachers should bear this fact in mind, lest they fall a prey to a mechanical devotion to mechanical methods, and thus miss the end for which all meth-

ods exist. There can be no doubt that this danger has often been realized in our Churches. The growth of intelligence, the spread of good taste, a more independent and critical way of thinking, have made many traditional methods distasteful or ineffective. This is especially the case with revival methods, many of which, moreover, rest upon an outgrown theology, and all of which need to be revised in the interest of both good sense and religion. The indications are that hereafter the Churches will have to rely mainly on religious training for children and "hand-picking" for the mature. In any case, we must remember that there is nothing sacred in methods; that the present value of a method depends on its adaptation to present circumstances; and that the most effective method is the best.

There is a general reaction in the pedagogical world against rigid mechanical methods, and a demand for individual and sympathetic treatment of pupils. This reaction should extend to religious pedagogy. Mechanism has been overdone here, and there is great need for some independence, originality, flexibility, and living sympathy on the part of the religious teacher. Meanwhile, critical friends must administer "faithful wounds."

None of these things, nor all of them together, can give life; but a due regard of them will remove obstructions which hinder life's best development. Because of needless misunderstandings, many wander in the desert, unable to enter the promised land.

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152 p. ; 18 cm.

A0315416

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